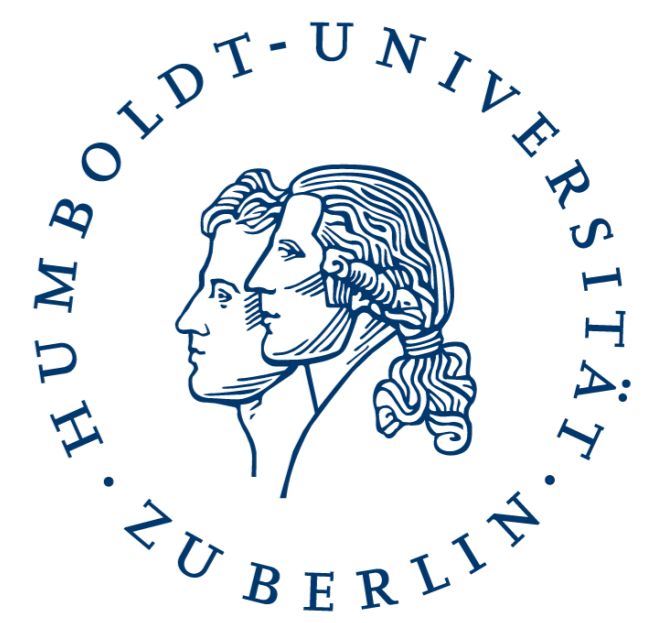


Development cooperation and (mis-)representation:

Challenging the 'White Saviour Complex' and stereotypical narratives of 'Africa' through social media



Topic – Research - Framework



Not only do celebrities, aid organisations and volunteers still come to countries in the so called 'Global South' in order to 'aid' them, but those visits get shared online, too. What earlier used to be printed in magazines, is now quickly distributed via the internet. While some scholars caution us not to ascribe too much potential to digital platforms such as Instagram in the African context, a growing number of critical voices from the African continent or diaspora seems to emerge exactly from those social media to counter stereotypical images and narratives of Africa. In addition to the changing technical infrastructure, a second reason for this increasing participation can be identified in the shifting global aid practices and actors in the industry: the presence of the 'Emerging Donors'. In my Master thesis, I seek to connect these hitherto isolated strands of research to analyse if and how actors voice their dissent on development cooperation practices, 'white saviourism' and 'poverty porn' via social media.

Picture: The German Model Stefanie Giesinger in Malawi in November 2019, as shared in her Instagram-Stories. While many of her followers were impressed, others criticised her for exploiting the children (taken from @nowwhitesaviors, November 17th, 2019, accessed March sixth, 2020).

Method – Theory – Literature Review

As a theoretical framework questions of (visual) power exertion (over 'Africa') and counterpublics are discussed while considering their shortcomings in African contexts. Furthermore, the concept of communicative figurations is introduced, as it does not only consider media and language relations but tries to see changes in a bigger and possibly global picture. A literature based analysis of the global changing aid industry is conducted. I additionally look at literature and studies that research the development of media technology on the African continent.

With the help of the visual analysis tools established in the cultural studies I analyse content on Instagram that is frequently posted and that seems to serve the aforementioned stereotypes on 'Africa'. On the same platform, however, a NGO from Uganda speaks out on 'white saviourism'. I will analyse this forum in more depth, as well as compare it to the Instagram work of Layla F. Saad, the account 'Everyday Africa' and others.

Expected Results – Limitations – Outlook

The analysis can not be exhaustive but offers insights into different trends and voices in the debate on development cooperation. As the Account 'No White Saviors' grew incredibly fast, accumulating more than 300,000 subscribers in less than two years, their work seems to be considered necessary and valuable by a diverse audience, probably encouraging more people to also use social media for similar activism. The examples I analyse mainly comment on individual people or NGOs but they see them as a symptom of global hierarchies and power structures, thus the thesis connects valuable research strands.

Becker, Danielle. "Instagram as a Potential Platform for Alternative Visual Culture in South Africa." In *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the "Heart of Darkness" to "Africa Rising"*, by Mel Bunce, Suzanne Franks and Chris Paterson, 102-112. 2017.

Kapoor, Ilan. *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008.



Picture: A signature graphic by the Ugandan Instagram account *No White Saviors* that replies to actions like Stefanie Giesinger's photograph (taken from @nowwhitesaviors, posted November 15th, 2019, accessed March sixth, 2020).